

Ground Report

End of Special Status - In Kashmir, Clampdown on Movement and Communication Fuels Anxieties

Friday 23 August 2019, by [ANDRABI Kaisar](#), [KAUL Sumir](#) (Date first published: 8 August 2019).

"They snatched our identity and slaughtered the trust of the masses," one resident of the Valley said.

Srinagar: Soon after Union home minister Amit Shah introduced a bill in the Rajya Sabha to end Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Articles 370 and 35A, and moved a resolution to bifurcate the state, people in the Valley, having no outside communication, learnt of the development through the radio and Doordarshan TV.

The day before, people had lost their internet connectivity at 11 pm, and by midnight, the cellular network had also vanished. When they woke up on the morning of August 5, Kashmir had lost its special status in the Indian constitution and was bifurcated into two union territories – Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

The Centre had made all the preparations on the ground before the home minister's speech. There were heavy deployments of forces on the roads which directed the people not to come out.

All shops, business establishments and educational institutes remained closed while streets wore an utterly deserted look.

Twenty-three-year-old Younis Ahmad, a resident of Zaldagar area in downtown Srinagar, stepped out from his two-storey house and said in anger: "This was their [government's] actual plan. See how they created fear amongst the people and cheated us? They will crush us completely now."

Strict restrictions on ambulances and medical facilities

Amid the chaos and anger, one could see few people sitting outside shops, looking confused and discussing what the announcement by the Centre would change in the state. "Me teer to fiqre ye kya kur emo (Make me understand what they announced)," said 42-year-old Waseem Ahmad from among a group of people in Zaldagar area.

As a boy began explaining the developments, his first reaction was: "Gov makloo (Everything is finished now)." He then added that many people in the state probably did not have an actual idea about what the government had announced, else there would have been some harsh reactions.

His claim was clarified by 26-year-old Aasif Nabi, a student at Amar Singh College in Srinagar, who said, "Don't you know there is a huge number of government forces everywhere? How do you expect reactions? If there would be any such move, there will be huge casualties – like in 2016."

For people like Aasif Nabi, the Centre's decision has breached the trust of the people as, before the announcement, they had been assured by governor Satya Pal Malik that there was no proposal to revoke Articles 370 and 35A. Malik, in his statement, had said to the people of the Valley that, "Unnecessary panic is being created by linking this to all kinds of other issues. A pure security measure is being mixed up with issues with which it has no connection."

"By this move, they have created more gap among the people on the ground. They snatched our identity and slaughtered the trust of the masses," said Javaid Ahamad, a resident of central Kashmir's Budgam district. He further added that "It seems the entire Kashmir is burning and there will be no one to hear us now."

Meanwhile, over the last three days, there have been protests and clashes in some parts of the downtown area of Srinagar, leaving scores of youths with pellet injuries. In the ophthalmology ward of SMHS on August 6, out of the five patients admitted with pellet wounds, the youngest - having pellets in both his eyes - was screaming. After a brief pause, his attendant said pleading anonymity: "The situation right now in the Valley seems hot. There might be worse incidents than this in other areas, but who knows?"

Doctors posted at SMHS hospital told The Wire that the rush of patients during these tense situations was not surprising: "We have been witnessing this now for years and during such circumstances, our first priority remains to control the anger of the attendants. The only problem we have faced is of consulting specialised doctors who are needed on time. Due to the unavailability of communication, it becomes difficult," said Dr Ifat Mir.

Migration of non-locals and prolonged misery

Union minister Shah's claim in his speech of bringing people closer to the Valley seems to have already been upended. According to the 2011 Census, around six lakh non-local labourers are working in Kashmir. Soon after the Central government's decision, many began leaving.

A huge number of non-locals who have been working in the Valley for over a decade were seen standing outside Srinagar's tourist centre waiting for transport to leave. "We have never seen anything like this. We have witnessed almost three uprisings in Kashmir, but the situation right now seems thicker than ever. It's scary and we want to save our lives," said 25-year-old Shahansha from West Bengal who had been living in Nawakadal area of downtown Srinagar since 2008.

The situation worsened on August 5, when several areas of the city were blocked with concentrated wires, leaving patients - coming in through ambulances and private vehicles from different corners of the Valley for treatment - to suffer.

An octogenarian, Ghulam Ahmad Lone, who belong to Tral area of south Kashmiri's Pulwama district - some 35 kilometres away from the capital city - was sitting outside the emergency ward of SMHS Hospital wearing ragged slippers. He told The Wire that his daughter, 38-year-old Shaheena Jan had some health complications and the local hospital had referred them to Srinagar. However, due to strict security reasons, they had been frisked by the government forces at several places.

"After every 100 meters, there were checkpoints and the forces were not allowing us to proceed, citing reasons of security issues. It was very difficult for us to reach here. We took alternative routes that were too vulnerable," he said.

Jahangir Khan, 35, a resident of Nishat area, along with his nine-year-old son Basit, said that he had been at the hospital since Sunday. Due to the communication blackout, he had no idea about the situation back at home.

"There have been announcements by the forces with handheld speakers asking people to refrain from moving out of their homes. I have not witnessed such strictness even during Burhan Wani's uprising. I am out of cash since Tuesday morning and I am wondering how I will communicate with my family about the issue. I'm hungry and blank," he sighed.

Several youths in the Valley, however, told The Wire that the government's decision will not stop them from fighting for their right to self-determination. A student of Government Degree College Pulwama said on the condition of anonymity: "This could become another reason for several youths to join militancy as they have realised that India has been playing with their emotions and has shown them false dreams," he said.

He added after a brief pause that through Article 370, they had a unique identity, and now that has died.

Indian security forces personnel stand guard next to concertina wire laid across a road during restrictions after the government scrapped special status for Kashmir, in Srinagar August 7, 2019.

Photo: Reuters/Danish Ismail

Anxiety after communication blackout

The sudden communication blackout in the Valley by the authorities raised anxieties of scores of parents whose children are currently studying outside the region. "We have been sieged inside our houses for more than 55 hours now and there is no hope of any development in communication. My 21-year-old son is studying in Jammu, and since Sunday night, we have had no communication with him. He also doesn't know whether we are alive or dead," said 51-year-old Aijaz Ahmad Sofi, a government school teacher who resides in Khanyar area.

In a similar situation, 40 girls residing at a private hostel in Rajbagh area were restless and frightened about how they would contact their families. The owner of the guest house, Parvaiz Ahmad, told The Wire that the girls at his hostel are safe but the complete silence across Kashmir had lead to fear.

Seventeen-year-old Asmat Jan, a resident of north Kashmir's Kupwara district, said that soon after she got to know about the removal of Article 370 and Article 35 A, she began feeling restless.

"Our teachers at the Aakash Academy went back to Delhi after they were ordered to leave Kashmir 'as soon as possible'. We don't know if they will come back or not," said Saqiba Jan, a class XII student from south Kashmir's Anantnag district.

Other girls sitting around her added that "We have no idea about the outside world and are feeling worried; will we be able to go back to our homes? We are missing our families."

On August 8, HuffPost India reported that a 17-year-old boy had died after being cornered by the paramilitary forces while he was playing on Monday. HuffPost also noted that it's correspondent's interviews with authorities at the Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital, had revealed that as many as 13 people in the treatment centre had suffered pellet injuries as well.

According to another report in the Indian Express, on August 7, as alleged by his family, a 17-year-old youth, Osaib Altaf died after he jumped into the Jhelum river when he was being chased by security personnel in Srinagar.

Meanwhile, as per reports, many mainstream leaders have been detained or put under preventive arrest.

Kaisar Andrabi

• THE WIRE. 08/AUG/2019:

<https://thewire.in/rights/kashmir-article370-srinagar-rights>

• *Kaisar Andrabi is a Srinagar-based journalist, and currently with The Kashmir Walla, a local news magazine.*

Over 500 Political Workers, Leaders in Detention

Former chief ministers Omar Abdullah of the National Conference and Mehbooba Mufti of the PDP have been detained at Hari Niwas on Gupkar road.

Srinagar: Over 500 important political workers and leaders, including former chief ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, have been detained in Jammu and Kashmir since the Centre decided to revoke provisions of Article 370 and divide the state to two union territories, officials said.

Activists across the political spectrum have been detained in Srinagar as well as other parts of the Valley, they said.

According to latest reports, about 560 such workers have been lodged in makeshift detention centres in Sher-e-Kashmir International Convention Centre in Srinagar and other such centres in Baramulla and Gurez.

Former chief ministers Omar Abdullah of the National Conference and Mehbooba Mufti of the PDP have been detained at Hari Niwas on Gupkar road.

Amid the restrictions in place in the city, one person was killed in Noorbagh locality. A group of youngsters had gathered in the area and they were chased by CRPF personnel because of confusion over the curfew, they said.

One of the youths jumped into the Jhelum river to escape the wrath of the heavily-armed paramilitary forces, but drowned. There was a protest in the locality but it ended after a cane charging in which six people were injured, they said.

The officials said curfew has not been declared, but authorities have ordered strict implementation of Section 144 of the CrPC which prohibits the assembly of over five people in an area.

There are reports of other such clashes from across the Valley but details are still not known because of the clampdown on communication links, they said.

Visuals of National Security Advisor Ajit Doval having lunch with locals, with closed shops in the backdrop, at an undisclosed locality were circulated in the media. He was heard saying in the video that once the new administration is set up, things will change.

Dressed in a green sleeveless bomber jacket and khaki and blue formals, he was also seen addressing personnel of the Jammu and Kashmir Police, CRPF and Army separately, telling them about their successes in disturbed areas.

Parliament on Tuesday approved a resolution abrogating special status to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the constitution and a bill for splitting the state into two union territories.

The resolution was adopted by Lok Sabha with 351 members voting in its support and 72 against it, while one member abstained.

The bill to create two UTs – Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh – was passed by 370 votes in favour and 70 against. Modi was present in the House.

The resolution and the bill were approved by Rajya Sabha on Monday.

(PTI)

Sumir Kaul

- THE WIRE. 08/AUG/2019:

<https://thewire.in/security/kashmir-over-500-political-workers-leaders-in-detention>

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